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ÆSTHETIC DEVELOPMENT THE PROBLEM OF THE FUTURE.

THERE is no new or radical reform in the idea of æsthetic development in education. Music, rythmic games, drawing and painting, schoolroom decoration, and last of all hand-work mark the progress of a long line of regenerative efforts. With due appreciation and respect for these efforts, it must be acknowledged that our boys and girls grow up into men and women who in home and civic life continue to sin against the laws of beauty. The subject of æsthetic standards and their relation to the social question is in the air. The school becomes a final hope in social reforms. This means that in a maximum of eight years the educator must take a mass of youthful humanity ranging in instincts from barbarism to sensitive refinement, and substitute in their lives power of intelligent judgment for unreasoning instinct.

Under most favorable conditions it is difficult. Under some limitations it is next to impossible. The problem of the present seems to lie in the organization of material in the light of a closer analysis of child-nature and of logical processes.

Beauty is the result of conformity to laws — laws which manifest themselves in relationships of the concrete. Such relationships may be included in the term “harmony.” There must be harmony between the idea and its sentient expression. There must be harmony between the component terms of expression. Beauty is bound up in very definite qualities. Visual beauty, for instance, depends upon unified proportion, line, dark and light, and color. Power to create, and power to appreciate, depend upon the ability to abstract these qualities. Standards, then, correspond to the ideas which have been brought to consciousness. For example, supposing a child differentiates only red, yellow, and blue; some one of those colors may arouse a pleasant sensation. Out of that experience he abstracts the idea of that one color as the most desirable. Until a wider experience has taken its place that is his standard of color beauty. The color-sense of one who

is conscious of only the primaries can be effected in but two ways: first, the range of color concepts must be widened; this may be done through the reaction of expression as in painting; secondly, *individual* experience may be modified and accelerated by comparison with the results of others. To this end art masterpieces are used in education. If the child knows only red, yellow, and blue, and thinks red the most delightful of color-experiences, how much will his standard be affected by, we will say, a neutral-toned color symphony? It will be outside of his world. If the art masterpiece is to affect the standard, it must contain this familiar element. It is owing to failure in making this connection that much effort is abortive. To resume the color illustration, if the child is enabled to see an harmonious arrangement in which his favorite red is the keynote, as in a Navajo blanket, a bit of Indian beadwork, primitive pottery, or Egyptian wall decoration, he has been carried along the line of his own experience to the recognition of something in common with it, but better. He has been able to make more complete abstraction. No longer satisfied with his first ideal of an indefinite mass of red, he seeks satisfaction in an orderly arrangement of which it is the keynote.

Æsthetic development is an endless succession of such experiences. Elevation of standards is the result of creative activity. It is a part of the inner life, the outgrowth of individual experience.

In the efforts toward æsthetic redemption methods have at various times reached antipodal points. In one extreme the child has laboriously drawn cubes, mugs, and Greek honey-suckles. In the other, he has poured out his soul in fearful and wonderful creations. Because they were done without models and denoted a certain intellectual emancipation, we have seemed to expect him to find in the freedom of self-expression all the essentials for æsthetic growth. The cubes ended, as all isolated technical training is apt to do, in a mechanical exercise usually distasteful and almost meaningless. The undirected self-expression ended in the acquirement of a number of original conventions, both crude and ugly, which by much repetition must not only have hindered

more accurate observation, but also have reacted dangerously upon the child's taste. By the time that the critical faculty developed, disgust for his grotesque efforts put an end to interest. It is only sane to expect that between these two extremes, and through their mutual adjustment, the desirable mean will be found. The art work must possess an organic center, just as science and mathematics do. While the term may suggest pedagogical puritanism, there must be a technical sequence. The newer educational philosophy is teaching us that technical sequence does not exist in any specific set of things, nor in any specific set of exercises. It exists in the consciousness of the teacher. This consciousness must include the intelligent discrimination between the whim of the child which is purely an individual and passing interest, and his deep vital interests. The latter are in their nature universal, and should afford the stimulus for artistic expression. The teacher must know the child's capacity for bridging difficulties in expression by technical effort. This implies a knowledge of the standard which normal children can attain by means of honest methods and appeal to proper stimulus. Art organized with reference to these various adjustments will of necessity reach out into every part of the curriculum, not because it is the handmaiden of other subjects, but because it would afford æsthetic expression to the prevailing intellectual and emotional interests. It is evident that through isolation technical training may proceed without affecting the æsthetic standard, as may also an undirected and random form of expression. Neither does information insure such development.

The ability to name and place long lists of pictures may accompany vitiated taste. A confusion between the subject in art and the technique which constitutes the *art* of the thing leads to a corresponding confusion between moral and æsthetic purposes in the use of art masterpieces. The Sistine Madonna is of value in the schoolroom as an ethical influence. Divine motherhood is a subject which touches and idealizes the most vital chord of child-experience. The qualities which make it a work of art are found in its lines, its arrangements of dark and light, and its color. These are highly developed and remote from the child's point of view. He does

not abstract them at all. The æsthetic influence of such a picture would be subtle and difficult to trace. We would not wish to deny some unconscious effect, for the same argument would sweep away all our theories about environment. Do not misunderstand me; I am not arguing against such pictures; they are ethically invaluable. The point I wish to make is that, when we have hung the schoolroom walls with Madonnas, baby heads, animals, and various *subjects* dear to the infant heart, we are apt to rest on the supposition that we have contributed all the essentials for his proper æsthetic development. In reality we have left the greater part undone.

We must organize the materials which we take from the arts of the past in the light of psychology and logic rather than sentiment.

No product of the child should end in itself. A satisfied contemplation of his own work is a deadly influence. He should have a chance to compare it with something which is, in a way, an idealization of his own effort.

We need examples which are simple, sincere, and direct in technique. The primitive and archaic constitute a suitable primer. Free from the elaborations of a fuller interpretation of truth, a child is able to abstract from them color and line, converting them into tools for his own use. The evolution of this subject-matter should be carefully adjusted to the developing consciousness. Such adjustment will make it significant. In conjunction with the proper activities it will modify standards, and will finally grant the child his rightful share in the æsthetic inheritance of civilization.

There are two subjects which I would emphasize as related with this question of æsthetic development. They are pre-eminently the problems of the future. The first I have suggested, namely the proper selection and use of art masterpieces. In this connection, primitive art offers an almost unexplored field.

There is need of students to organize the material, need of creating a sufficient demand for it to insure its being reproduced in a form cheap enough for school use. The other subject is the so-called "art and crafts movement." This has come

upon us so swiftly that it is still in an undigested state. Sometimes it appears as busy-work—a few baskets, or a little weaving, to keep idle hands from mischief while the teacher is attending to others. Sometimes technical skill is attained without developing any idea of beauty; sometimes good design and color accompany weak and slovenly construction. Sometimes in the high school the lathe is multiplying the worst sins of the factory. The fact that art and manual-training teachers all over the country have felt the need of combining forces is promise of a day of better things. Whatever the standards of our people may be in the fine arts, their daily life has not yet been deeply touched by them. The desire of the ignorant to realize the outward forms of democracy in the symbols of social equality causes the demand for cheap imitations of the trappings of wealth. The rapid industrial changes which have substituted the factory for home manufacture have removed the typical processes from the public knowledge to such an extent that society has lost the sense of the value of labor and of the fundamental relations between function, form, and material. A degraded standard is inevitable.

The art and crafts movement is a protest against these conditions. Whatever may be the dream of its leaders, its greatest influence will undoubtedly be educational. It will not overthrow the machine. It will create a background of experience against which to place the machine. The school must furnish the experience which social conditions have removed. No young man or woman is going out of the high school properly fitted for the duties of citizenship if he does not know the value of the materials of life in terms of labor units. Neither will he have a high standard unless he has a consciousness of the fundamental fitness of things. He can get such knowledge only by personal experience. For this reason it is necessary to give the craft a place in the curriculum. It matters not whether it is that of pottery, textile, wood, or metal work; its value must lie in its development from primitive conditions through its various evolutionary stages ending in the factory. In the racial histories of art its beginnings appear in utilitarian motives. As the æsthetic interest emerges and persists, art follows two general lines of develop-

ment. Where allied with construction, it vitalizes the creation, and yet subordinates itself to the utilitarian and structural idea. Out of this alliance grow architecture, all of the artistic crafts, and the art of decorative design. When free from the limitations imposed by this alliance, its development progresses from symbolism and picture-writing to the unhampered expression of emotion in sculpture and painting. A craft cannot develop normally without the almost immediate expansion of the utilitarian to the æsthetic. Proportion, line, and color are essential elements of construction. If properly related, the art and craft ought to engender a love of honesty and character in construction. They ought to help the individual to eliminate the worthless trash, and enable him to simplify and elevate the standards of his life.

In closing, let me reiterate that any creative experience which brings to consciousness the fundamental laws of beauty gives the individual a key by which he may unlock the door of every fine art. He may be silent in their portals, but he listens, and, as he grows in understanding life, becomes more joyous and more complete.

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